

## France and the Economic Community of West African States

### Peacekeeping Partnership in Theory and Practice

On his first presidential visit to Africa in October 2012, François Hollande proclaimed that “the era of what was called in the past ‘*Françafrique*’ had ended. There is France and there is Africa. There is a partnership between France and Africa, with relations based on respect, clarity and solidarity” (Hollande 2012). The supposed partnership also extended to the realm of security. France would not intervene directly in African crises, but rather help reinforce the capacities of Africans to enable them to take care of the crises themselves. Thereby, Hollande also identified France’s partners by commending the roles of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) in previous conflicts, and African armed forces in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations. Moreover, against the background of the unfolding crisis in Mali, he called for a solution in partnership with ECOWAS and the AU. Consequently, France’s future military presence in Africa was supposed to be more transparent and, ultimately, reduced (Hollande 2012).

Eventually, however, the French intervened largely on their own in Mali, and were only later joined by forces from ECOWAS member states. Moreover, France has since even strengthened its military footprint on the African continent. This throws up the question of whether France is truly committed to an indirect military policy that leaves the stage to African actors. This apparent contrast between practice and discourse in France’s African military policy is not of recent vintage. The shift towards capacity-building, Africanization, and multilateralization has been professed, but not necessarily followed, by French policymakers since the late 1990s. President Hollande’s predecessor, Nicolas Sarkozy, also clearly voiced his preference and support for African peacekeeping solutions, which would avoid a direct involvement of French troops in African crises, and pre-empt accusations of neo-colonial aspirations. But in Sarkozy’s case too, this policy discourse did not necessarily align with reality. In 2011, the Ivorian post-electoral crisis saw a forceful French military intervention (Wyss 2013).

It is important to emphasise that France’s defence policy and military interventions have almost exclusively focused on and been adapted to its *pré carré* of Francophone African states with which Paris has maintained privileged security relations since decolonisation. As a corollary, French interventions have not been primarily driven by a peacekeeping agenda, but have rather been influenced by France’s desire to maintain its influence, to protect its long-term partners, and to pursue its economic and strategic interests in the region. While in some

cases this has helped to avoid further bloodshed, it is questionable whether the logic of French interventions is conducive to long-term stability in Africa (Powell 2016). Even though it is beyond the scope of this article to address this issue, it has to be borne in mind when assessing France's peacekeeping partnership with ECOWAS.

Meanwhile, France's predominant role in recent African conflicts also seems to run contrary to international calls and African advocacy for 'African solutions to African problems'. Since the temporary withdrawal of the great powers from Africa during the 1990s, African regional organisations have tried to take the security of their continent into their own hands. Supported by the international community, they have conducted their own peace operations, and thereby become peacekeeping actors in their own right (Williams 2008, 309-314). ECOWAS has stood at the forefront of this development and, since the beginning of the 1990s, has carried out peace operations in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, and Côte d'Ivoire (Obi 2009). As a result, ECOWAS has not only valuable experience, but also an increasingly sophisticated institutional infrastructure and framework to deal with crises in Africa. Moreover, the main regional protagonists in peace operations would still like to see more African ownership and, thereby, reduce their dependency on such external actors as France (Van der Lijn and Avezov 2015, 47-48). Consequently, at least in theory, ECOWAS would be an ideal partner for Paris to truly Africanize and multilateralize its military policy in Africa.

Moreover, regional solutions seem to be particularly adequate, because despite their predominantly local origins, conflicts in Africa tend to have a regional dimension as a result of weak governments, porous and inadequate borders, as well as military inefficiency (Williams 2011, 41). These problems are partially the result of and are compounded by the fact that – in line with Frederick Cooper's concept of the 'gatekeeper state' – many African states tend to be, on the one hand, prone to outside interference and influence, on which their rulers ultimately depend. On the other, the vying for the control of the gate, and the benefits that come with it, can lead to domestic instability and crisis, if not conflict (Cooper 2009, 156-190). Yet while these weaknesses and vulnerabilities make regional solutions a prerequisite, they have also prevented the emergence of fully-fledged regional security complexes, as defined by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver. Nevertheless, in their view, West Africa forms a proto-regional security complex, not least because of Nigeria's influential role and ECOWAS. But while the complex is clearly formed, security interdependence remains weak (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 219-224, 229-233). This has not prevented ECOWAS from

attempting, with mixed success, to transform the West African security complex into a security community, and thereby become a security actor in its own right.

Against this background, this article aims to assess whether, to what extent, and why the theoretical convergence of France's African security policy and the peacekeeping aspirations of ECOWAS does not necessarily translate into practice. This also entails the question of whether France, through its at times forceful interventions, pre-empts the peacekeeping efforts of ECOWAS or, rather, fills a gap where the regional organisation is unable or unwilling to intervene. These questions are not only pertinent in relation to the apparent divergence of policy discourse and practice, but also with regards to France's and ECOWAS' respective security roles in Africa. Despite decolonisation, France has retained a substantial military footprint and close security and defence relationships with most of its former colonies in West Africa. Since the late 1990s, these relationships have received an additional, a multilateral pillar, through the Reinforcement of African Peacekeeping Capacities (RECAMP) programme, for which ECOWAS has become an important partner (Charbonneau 2008, *passim*). There is thus an underlying security partnership between France and ECOWAS, which is supposed to enable the latter to fulfil its peacekeeping aspirations.

Consequently, there seems to be not only theoretical convergence between French and ECOWAS peacekeeping policies, but also a cooperative basis in practice. Yet this article argues that convergence in practice depends on the nature of an individual crisis, as well as the political, strategic, and economic interests of both France and ECOWAS member states. In order to make this argument, this article will, firstly, sketch the evolution of France's African security policy and ECOWAS's peacekeeping record from the 1990s to the early 2000s; secondly, examine France's capacity-building efforts and support to peace operations in West Africa; and, thirdly, study the roles of France and ECOWAS in the Ivorian post-electoral and the Malian crises, as well as the consequences for their security relationship and the African peace and security architecture.

### ***Theoretical Convergence***

At the theoretical level, France's security policy towards Africa and the crisis management activities and ambitions of ECOWAS are perfectly complementary. On the one hand, the French have subscribed to multilateralism and the Africanization of security in Africa over the last two decades. On the other, since the early 1990s, the West Africans have increasingly addressed the crises in their region themselves.

France began to multilateralize and Africanize its African strategy in reaction to important shifts in the international system and Africa after the Cold War: France could no longer portray itself as the bulwark against Soviet expansionism (Chafer 2001, 173); increased globalisation diminished Africa's economic importance; accelerated European integration and renewed transatlantic security cooperation reduced France's political and military independence; direct military involvement appeared increasingly risky in light of the protracted nature of African conflicts; and France's dominant role in francophone sub-Saharan Africa was subject to mounting criticism, especially after its contested role in the Rwandan Genocide (Kroslak 2007). France thus increasingly cooperated with the international community on African security issues, and supported regional peacekeeping forces. Therefore, the number of French troops and bases in Africa was to be reduced (Chafer 2002, 347-354). This did not mean, however, that France abandoned the unilateral pillar of its African strategy. The post-independence defence agreements remained in force, troops reductions were supposed to be compensated by professional rapid reaction forces, and Paris did not refrain from intervention if it considered its national interests at stake (Gregory 2000, 442-445). After the end of the 'cohabitation' with the socialists in 2002, and in light of the spread of international terrorism and Africa's economic resurgence, President Jacques Chirac, a staunch supporter of a strong French role in Africa, even reinforced the bilateral pillar (Hugon 2007, 57, 61, 66). France thus gave preference to multilateral and African frameworks but, if necessary, would intervene on its own. This new approach was almost immediately put into practice in 2002-2003, when France intervened in the Democratic Republic of Congo with its European partners, and in Côte d'Ivoire alongside ECOWAS (Banégas, Marchal, and Meimon 2007, 21). Although in the Ivorian case the French had first intervened independently (Charbonneau 2012, 513), they eventually teamed up with a partner that could at this stage already look back on a rather substantial peacekeeping record.

ECOWAS played a pioneering role in regional peacekeeping in Africa. It was the first organisation to launch a major peacekeeping operation, to collaborate with the UN to address a complex emergency, and to establish a crisis management framework (Olonisakin 2011, 12). Admittedly, these achievements should not distract from the political, military, and financial difficulties that ECOWAS has faced in addressing conflicts and deploying peace operations. Nevertheless, from an organisation that had originally been established in 1975 to promote regional economic integration and Nigeria's hegemonic aspirations, it has evolved into an important security actor. Initially, this was rendered possible by the great power withdrawal from the African continent in the wake of the end of the Cold War, and Nigeria's

willingness to shoulder the brunt of the cost of the peacekeeping force (Reno 2012, 178). In reaction to the Liberian Civil War, in 1990, a Nigerian-led coalition of the willing established the organisation's first peacekeeping force, the ECOWAS Monitoring and Observer Group (ECOMOG). Within the same decade, ECOMOG also intervened in Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau (Adebajo 2002). While Nigeria was absent in Guinea-Bissau, it provided the bulk of troops and finances in Liberia and Sierra Leone. ECOMOG was an opportunity for Abuja to assert its increasingly dominant role in West Africa (Véron 2006, 116; Perrot 2005, 116). But ECOMOG operations suffered from a number of problems, which were related to political disagreements among West African leaders, institutional weaknesses, command and control, the lack of operational coordination, logistical shortcomings, and the behaviour of troops on the ground. The military shortcomings were particularly severe in Guinea-Bissau, where, in the absence of Nigerian firepower, ECOMOG failed to impose peace. This illustrated ECOWAS's dependence on Nigeria's military muscle for peace operations (Luntumbe 2013, 14-15), which could not be compensated by the indirect support of external powers, notably of France (Obi 2009).

In response to its experiences in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Bissau, ECOWAS began to reform its legal and institutional framework. But in the midst of this process, it was confronted first with renewed civil war in Liberia, and then with the outbreak of the Ivorian crisis. In Liberia, this led to the deployment of the ECOWAS Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL) in summer 2003. ECOMIL lacked, however, the military capacity and capabilities to fulfil its peacekeeping role, and was rapidly absorbed by the much larger UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). In the Ivorian case, after the decision in late 2002 to send a peacekeeping force to monitor the short-lived ceasefire it had brokered with the help of France, the deployment of the ECOWAS Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (ECOMICI) encountered significant delays, and only arrived on the ground in spring 2003. In the meantime, the peacekeeping role was shouldered by the French Licorne Force, which, based in Port Bouët, had been deployed immediately after the outbreak of the crisis to protect French citizens and interests. The French forces had first to step in to monitor the ceasefire, then to help ECOMICI to deploy and, finally, to provide it with logistical and operational support on the ground. Yet in order to gain international legitimacy, and reduce the cost of its involvement, France pushed in the UN Security Council for the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), which eventually absorbed ECOMICI (Wyss 2013, 91-93).

ECOMIL and ECOMICI were thus a forceful demonstration that ECOWAS lacked the logistical, human, material, and financial resources to conduct large-scale peace

operations. Meanwhile, for both missions ECOWAS relied on external support, from the UN, the United States, the United Kingdom and, notably, France (Elowson and MacDermott 2010, 33). Moreover, in light of Nigeria's increasing reluctance to shoulder the brunt of the burden, the role of partners has become increasingly important (Iwalide and Uchechukwu Agbo 2012, 364). Consequently, the evolution of France's African strategy on the one hand, and of the peacekeeping role of ECOWAS on the other, seems to have opened up an opportunity for a mutually beneficial partnership.

### ***Capacity-building and Operational Support***

The Africanization of France's strategy and peacekeeping in Africa during the 1990s has added a multilateral dimension to the historically substantial cooperation between the French and African armed forces. This cooperation has been particularly pronounced in West Africa. Whereas Paris focused first on its traditional sphere of influence, it has also increasingly extended its cooperation to Anglophone and Lusophone West Africa. As a result, Paris has become an important security partner for ECOWAS. Thereby, France has not only supported the capacity-building of West African armed forces, but also provided operational support to ECOWAS peace operations. Therefore, Paris reorganised its institutional structure for military cooperation, launched a capacity-building programme, and has increasingly cooperated with the United States, the UN and, especially, its European partners.

France began to reform its military cooperation to support the capacity-building of African armed forces in 1997. At that time, the AU had not yet substituted the largely ineffective Organisation of African Unity (OAU), so the focus was initially on the Regional Economic Communities (RECs). The priority was first given to France's traditional allies, the francophone member states of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA). But in line with its new approach towards the African continent, France wanted to move beyond the *pré carré*. Therefore, and because the Nigerian-led ECOWAS was the most active African peacekeeper, the cooperation was slowly extended to most of the region (Bagayoko-Penone 2001, 161, 163, 166-167). This was supposed to allow France to be in tune with the regionalisation and Africanization of the African security architecture (Gnanguenon 2007, 162).

As a result of these developments, political infighting, and in order to put the new approach into practice, in 1998, the Military Cooperation Mission was replaced by the Direction of Military and Defence Cooperation (*La Lettre du Continent* 19 November 1998), which in 2009 was renamed Direction of Security and Defence Cooperation (DCSD). The

DCSD, which is situated in the Foreign Ministry and composed of diplomats, military personnel, policemen, and civil protection experts, is responsible for the ‘structural cooperation’. Thereby, it cooperates with the Armed Forces Staff and the different services, and the Direction for International Cooperation (Interior Ministry), which are responsible for the ‘operational cooperation’. In sub-Saharan Africa, the DCSD focuses on capacity-building and peacekeeping, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, security sector reform, the rule of law, domestic security, civil protection, arms and technology transfers, and privileges the partnership with regional organisations (DCSD 2011). The operational cooperation relies on the defence attachés within the French embassies, and the prepositioned forces, which help to support and train the regional brigades for the AU’s African Standby Force (ASF), as well as any other potentially deployed *ad hoc* African forces. Meanwhile, together with its international and European partners, the DCSD supports three peacekeeping training schools in Africa, of which two – the Ecole de Maintien de la Paix Alioune Blondin Beye in Bamako and the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre – are in West Africa (Coopération de sécurité et de défense 2015). Moreover, it oversees the Ecoles Nationales à Vocation Régionale (ENVR), which France began to establish in 1997 in partnership with African countries to offer general and specialised military training to middle- and senior-ranking African officers (Patry 2012, 172-175). Out of a total of 16 such schools, 9 are in ECOWAS member states (DCSD 2012).

Within this evolving security cooperation framework, France has focused on the RECAP programme and concept. Launched in 1998, it aims to build up African peacekeeping capacities. Its establishment was part of a general trend in the late 1990s, which also saw the creation of American and British capacity-building programmes (Berman 2002). The Americans, the British, and the French have since sought to harmonize and further multilateralize their programmes (Chafer and Cumming 2010, 1138). The RECAP concept is not set in stone, but has continuously been adapted to the changing international environment and African peacekeeping landscape. The programme contains a bilateral and a multilateral pillar, since it operates in partnership with both individual states and regional organisations. Yet the cooperation with the AU and the RECs is important, especially since one of the major long-term aims has been to help with the establishment of the ASF. Therefore, the French have placed liaison officers with the AU and the RECs (Gnanguenon 2007, 170). Although the French welcome the participation of non-francophone countries in RECAP, for obvious historical reasons, the majority of the participants have come from France’s traditional sphere of influence. In order to prevent accusations of a francophone

bias, and to share the financial burden, since 2008 France has also applied the RECAMP doctrine together with its European partners at the continental level under the label EURORECAMP (Chafer and Cumming 2010, 1139; EU 2009).

With RECAMP, France intervenes in the capacity-building of African peacekeeping forces through three courses of action: training of middle- and senior ranking officers; support to the training or organisation of staff, units, and institutions that intervene in the African Peace and Security Architecture, notably through training exercises; and operational support to contingents in peacekeeping operations. The training of African officers takes place either in France itself at the War School or the Institute of Advanced Studies in National Defence (IHEDN), or in Africa at the ENVRs (*La Lettre du Continent* 16 and 25 November 1999). The second course of action consists of tactical operational training for staff and units through a series of bilateral and regional exercises at brigade level. As for operational support, France sends specialist detachments to help with operational preparations; provides logistical support and materiel from its depots in Africa for the actual deployment; and continues to provide logistical, technical, and material assistance once an African force is deployed. This does not, however, preclude the deployment of elite or special units to help African troops (Centre interarmées de concepts, de doctrines et d'expérimentations 2011; Le Pautremat 2012, 190-197). Moreover, prior to the launch of Operation Licorne in 2002, it was assumed that the capacity-building under RECAMP would render substantial French interventions unnecessary. But thereafter, RECAMP “was redefined”, according to Bruno Charbonneau, “as complementing French ‘peacekeeping’ (direct military intervention) and traditional training of African armed forces (indirect intervention)” (2008, 113). Consequently, the unilateral or, bilateral pillar of France’s African strategy has remained intact with RECAMP. This has also been evident in France’s operational training and support of ECOWAS.

In addition to the training offered in military schools in France and West Africa, the French have conducted operational exercises with ECOWAS, and armed forces of its individual member states. At the regional level, examples are the French support of the Guidimakha exercise at the border of Mali, Mauritania, and Senegal in 1998, and the Bénin exercise in 2004, which marked the establishment of the ECOWAS joint force (*La Lettre du Continent*, 26 February 1998; Etat-major interarmées de force et d'entraînement 2004; Zecchini 2004). Moreover, France has also teamed up with its European partners, notably the United Kingdom and the EU. Together with the British, in 2000, the French supported the map exercise Blue Pelican at the ECOWAS Executive Secretariat and, in 2007, they funded



an ECOWAS military training exercise. A year later, they then participated, alongside the EU, in the first exercise to assess the readiness of the ECOWAS Standby Force (Chafer 2013, 245). RECAMP has involved, however, also bilateral operational training, such as the Franco-Ivorian Sassandra exercise in 1999 (Le Hunsec 2009, 100-103).

Meanwhile, France has also supported ECOWAS peace operations. In the late 1990s, the French Armed Forces provided logistical, material, and operational support to ECOMOG in Guinea-Bissau. The French Armed Forces deployed the West African peacekeeping force, which was equipped with materiel from France's depot in Dakar (Berman 2003, 207; *La Lettre du Continent* 3 December 1998). Although the ECOMOG operation in Guinea-Bissau was largely a failure, at least its deployment was relatively swift. In the Ivorian case, by contrast, political, logistical, and financial difficulties delayed the arrival of ECOWAS troops. This allowed the already deployed French Licorne Force to take on the peacekeeping role and, as a corollary, France to remain the ultimate arbiter. When ECOMICI eventually began to deploy in greater numbers in spring 2003, France provided financial, logistical, material and, especially, operational support. (Sada 2003, 328; Serequeberhan 2006, 325). The presence of an ECOWAS force, however ineffective it was, provided at least a fig leaf for the Africanization pillar of France's reformed African strategy. Yet the direct intervention of Licorne could also be interpreted as the failure of France's capacity-building programme (Smith 2004).

Indeed, the ECOWAS operations in Guinea-Bissau and Côte d'Ivoire demonstrated not only that the West African peacekeepers were dependent on external, notably French support, but also that they were still unable to fulfil their mission (Augé 2008, 49-50). It thus has to be questioned whether the French capacity-building efforts have been appropriate to further the Africanization of peacekeeping, and thereby enable ECOWAS to be a peacekeeper in its own right. The problem is that the programme does not do away with African dependence. The reliance on both French theoretical and operational support is built into the programme (N'Diaye 2009, 18). Admittedly, and as the following examples of the Ivorian and the Malian crises illustrate, ECOWAS member states have also been responsible for their organisation's peacekeeping failures. Nevertheless, according to Tony Chafer, "France has made it clear that, while it does want to transfer responsibilities to Africans, [...] it has no intention of leaving" (Chafer 2013, 250).

### ***A Flawed Partnership?***

When Sarkozy arrived in the Elysée in 2007, France's new African strategy was well in place. Moreover, the capacity-building programme had already been running for a decade. Yet the new French President was not willing to simply carry on with the status quo, but promised to strengthen the multilateral pillar, and thereby further reduce the bilateral pillar of France's African policy. Eventually, however, the forceful intervention in Côte d'Ivoire had not only the opposite effect, but also came instead of an African solution. When Hollande succeeded Sarkozy, he also promised a break with past policies, and announced an equal partnership with African security actors. But again, a major crisis – this time in Mali – was met with a French, rather than an African solution. Nevertheless, in both cases the French worked in partnership with ECOWAS, either at a political or a military level, or both. France and ECOWAS are, however, unequal partners, and in the wake of both the Ivorian and the Malian crises, the French have reasserted their predominant security role in West Africa. France's interests in the region have been too strong to entrust them to what Paris sees as a politically incohesive and militarily weak organisation.

Therefore, the option for direct intervention has always been left open. Admittedly, Sarkozy promised a mainly humanitarian and multilateral approach towards Africa, and that France would help to strengthen African peacekeeping capacities, refrain from intervention in domestic power struggles, revise the bilateral defence agreements to make them more transparent, and reduce the number of French troops in Africa (Sarkozy 2007, 151-152). Indeed, his government began with the revision of the defence agreements and troop reductions in Africa. Meanwhile, however, the 2008 defence white paper made it clear that France had major interests in Africa, and would be willing to do whatever it took to protect them, especially since Paris saw itself in competition for influence and resources with other, notably 'Asian' powers. According to this strategy, Africa was of prime strategic interest, because of its human and economic potential, as well as its natural resources. Parts of the continent remained, however, confronted with protracted conflicts, which hampered not only Africa's economic development, but also provoked migratory waves and crime affecting Europe. In order to remedy this situation, France, together with its European partners, was supposed to help build up African crisis management and peacekeeping capacities, and to address African security within a multilateral framework. But simultaneously, the white paper also had a more interventionist language. Not only did it endorse the responsibility to protect principle, but it also left the door open for unilateral interventions to protect French nationals, implement bilateral defence agreements, and protect national interests (République française 2008, 44-46, 71-72, 114-115, 122-123). France's role in the denouement of the

Ivorian post-electoral crisis in 2011 forcefully demonstrated that it was still ready to intervene directly, if considered necessary, even though it was in a multilateral framework and with African diplomatic support. Yet the intervention of the Licorne Force only came in reaction to African inaction.

At first, it seemed as if ECOWAS took control of the crisis management. In response to Laurent Gbagbo's refusal to accept his defeat in the elections of late 2010, and vacate the presidency for Alassane Ouattara, a group of West African states led by Nigeria wanted ECOWAS to play a key role in the resolution of the crisis (IISS 2011, 291-292). On 24 December 2010, the West African organisation threatened to oust Gbagbo by force if necessary (ECOWAS 2010). This proved, however, to be an empty threat. Even though the ECOWAS Chiefs of Staff examined the possibility of intervention (*Le Monde* 29 December 2010), the organisation's various heads of state and government could not agree on a peace operation. The main advocate for a West African peacekeeping force was the Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan, who hoped that it would allow him to strengthen his country's international position. Thereby, he received the support from Burkinabé President Blaise Compaoré, who feared the sudden and uncontrolled return of millions of his compatriots; the President of Senegal, Abdoulaye Wade, who wanted to protect Senegalese economic interests; and the President of Sierra Leone, Ernest Koroma, who upheld the flag of democracy. This group was, however, opposed by Gambia, which simply refused to participate; Liberia, which feared that it could lead to a massive influx of refugees and regional destabilisation; Guinea, which was absorbed by domestic affairs; and, especially, Benin, Ghana, and Togo, which, despite claiming to be neutral, were close to Gbagbo (Interviews with Western diplomats, Abidjan, 22 and 24 May 2012; Rouppert 2012, 20-21). Furthermore, ECOWAS lacked the financial and military means to rapidly mobilise and deploy an effective peacekeeping force (Interview with Western diplomat, Abidjan, 23 May 2012; Hofnung 2011, 163). Consequently, a regional peace operation did not materialise, and on 10 February 2011, ECOWAS officially refocused its attention on finding a political solution to the crisis (ECOWAS 10 February 2011). The AU, meanwhile, even struggled to find a common position towards the Ivorian crisis, and the military option was never seriously considered (*La Lettre du Continent* 23 December 2010 and 13 January 2011; Interview with Western diplomat, Abidjan, 24 May 2012).

The hopes of France, which from the beginning had supported an ECOWAS or AU solution to the Ivorian crisis, were thus disappointed (Guibert and Nougayrède 2010). As a result, Sarkozy began to prepare the ground for a joint UN-French military intervention to

halt the spiral of violence in Côte d'Ivoire, and thereby protect French economic interests and expatriates. ECOWAS member states, notably Nigeria, proved to be important political partners in this process. On the one hand, they were helpful in overcoming South African resistance to the recognition of Ouattara as the rightful president of Côte d'Ivoire within the AU (AU 10 March 2011). On the other, on 25 March 2011, ECOWAS passed a resolution that called on the UN Security Council to enable UNOCI "to use all necessary means to protect life and property, and to facilitate the immediate transfer of power" to Ouattara (ECOWAS 25 March 2011). This allowed France to overcome Chinese and Russian opposition in the UN Security Council to push through Resolution 1975, which, in addition to the recognition of Ouattara as the legitimate president and condemning Gbagbo, authorised UNOCI and the French Licorne Force "to use all necessary means to carry out its mandate to protect civilians" (UN 30 March 2011). A few days later, Licorne and, to a lesser extent, UNOCI, intervened in the battle for Abidjan, brought down Gbagbo, and installed Ouattara in power (Wyss 2014, 140-142). The ECOWAS resolution of 25 March, and the diplomatic support of leading West African states within the AU, had been instrumental in enabling France to intervene in Côte d'Ivoire with a high degree of international legitimacy. Eventually, however, it was France, and not the West African organisation that brought the post-electoral crisis to an end.

In Mali, the partnership went beyond the political, and extended to the military level. Despite important efforts by ECOWAS and France's preference for an African solution, it was French, and not West African troops, who had the decisive impact on the ground. When Hollande assumed office in mid-May 2012, the Malian crisis was already in full swing. It was in response to this crisis that he refined his African policy, which had significant resemblance to that of Sarkozy. But in contrast to his predecessor, he made Mali a priority. As argued by Charbonneau, "it was the crucial French diplomatic and military efforts that transformed Mali into an 'international' problem" (Charbonneau 2014, 197). Yet initially, in line with Hollande's advocacy for an equal partnership, Paris supported African, notably West African responses to the crisis.

ECOWAS was quick in condemning the March 2012 coup, which laid bare Bamako's loss of control of the northern part of Mali to the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), and other groups with links to Al-Qaeda. In late March, ECOWAS called for an immediate return to constitutional rule, and threatened the junta in Bamako with the use of force (ECOWAS 27 March 2012; *Le Monde* 28 March 2012). But shortly afterwards, the need for intervention appeared less urgent, because the organisation's mediation efforts

led in early April to a framework agreement, which set out a transition period for the return to constitutional rule. ECOWAS then shifted its attention to the northern armed groups. In mid-April, it decided to set up the ECOWAS Mission in Mali (MICEMA) to restore territorial integrity and constitutional order. But MICEMA never went beyond the drawing board, because of the Malian junta's hostility to the presence of West African troops in Bamako, disagreements within ECOWAS, the failure to win over Mali's neighbours Algeria and Mauritania, logistical and financial constraints, as well as the lack of military capabilities and capacities (Théroux-Bénoni 2014, 172-175).

In light of this impasse, the AU began to play a more active role from June 2012 onwards by trying to transform the West African response into a continental one (Théroux-Bénoni 2014, 175). Meanwhile, France also began to play an active role. On the one hand, it drummed up support for an African intervention in Mali within the region and the UN and, on the other, it provided military planners to ECOWAS and the AU (Weiss and Welz 2014, 896; *Jeune Afrique* 26 July 2012). This support was necessary, especially after the UN Security Council had refused to authorise an ECOWAS force in early July 2012 (AP 6 July 2012). Moreover, according to the French, intervention was "unavoidable", but they were not supposed to take the military lead (*Le Monde* 7 August 2012). With the help of France and, to a lesser degree, the AU, ECOWAS thus continued to plan for action. In light of the deteriorating security situation in Mali, this seemed increasingly urgent, and in early autumn, Malian interim President Dioncounda Traoré called for an ECOWAS intervention (Ahmed 15 August 2012; Roger 5 September 2012). Even though the AU and ECOWAS increasingly disputed the leadership of the mission, they wanted to move swiftly, and called on the UN Security Council to authorise an African, West African-led intervention. But the UN Security Council, especially the United States, and even France were not yet convinced about the feasibility of the mission. On the initiative of the French, who aimed for a rapid intervention, in October, the Security Council gave ECOWAS and the AU 45 days to come up with a more realistic plan (*Jeune Afrique* 27 September, 1 and 11 October 2012; UN 12 October 2012). Under the aegis of the AU and with sizeable support from France, ECOWAS thus refined its plans and member states officially pledged troops for the operation. Finally, on 20 December, US resistance was overcome, and the UN Security Council authorized what had become, not least because of the increasing involvement of the AU, the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) (*Le Monde* 12 November 2012; *Jeune Afrique* 7 December 2012; UN 20 December 2012).

This did not mean, however, that the deployment of AFISMA was imminent. The hopes of the French, who aimed for a deployment in early 2013, and therefore pledged logistical, technical, and intelligence support, were unrealistic (*Jeune Afrique*, 24 December 2012). Firstly, the chronically underfunded ECOWAS, as well as the AU, lacked the necessary financial resources. Secondly, the UN was unwilling to provide the required funds and logistical support. Thirdly, ECOWAS did not have the military capacity to intervene, and neither did the Malian army, which was supposed to take the lead in the ‘reconquest’ of Northern Mali. Fourthly, the efforts were hampered by a lack of coordination and tensions between AU and ECOWAS. Finally, those who held the reins of power in Bamako never really wanted to host an ECOWAS-led operation (Théroux-Bénoni 2014, 175-176; Weiss and Welz 2014, 897, 900; Vines 2013, 105, 108). As a result, on 10 January 2013, when the Islamist Groups – Ansar Dine, the Movement for Unity and Jihad, and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb – launched their pre-emptive offensive towards the South, they were met by French, and not African forces.

The French Armed Forces had planned for this eventuality (Adam 2013, 12), and the Islamist offensive tipped the balance in favour of Operation Serval, which was motivated by a set of nine reasons. First, there was the absence of an African solution. Second, the EU and its member states did not share France’s threat perception, and were thus largely uninterested. Third, the UN was reluctant to make a substantial commitment. Fourth, against the background of the economic crisis and with a new defence white paper in the making, the armed forces wanted to demonstrate their usefulness, and thereby forestall defence budget cuts. Fifth, and related to the previous point, the armed forces had the ear of the President through the Defence Minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, and the President’s Military Chief of Staff, General Benoît Puga. Sixth, not only the Malian government itself, but also African leaders, notably Mahamadou Issoufou of Niger, Macky Sall of Senegal, and Alpha Condé of Guinea, favoured a French intervention. Seventh, the crisis was seen by Paris as a threefold security threat to France and Europe, because it favoured the spread of Islamist terrorism and organised crime, and could unleash a wave of refugees. Eighth, Paris wanted to protect its economic interests in the region, notably the access to uranium in Niger. Finally, as the major military power in the region, and in line with its aspiration of grandeur, there was also a sense of responsibility that pushed the French towards intervention (Marchal 2013, 488-489; Weiss and Welz 2014, 897, 900, 903; Chafer 2014, 522-524).

France’s almost immediately successful military campaign was largely welcomed by the Malian population and the international community, and at last led to the deployment of

AFISMA (Avezov and Smit 2014; AFP 13 January 2013). The mostly West African troops arrived, however, only slowly, and once deployed, they proved to be largely ineffective and had to rely on French support (Carayol 2013; *Jeune Afrique* 10 April 2013). Yet Paris did not want to shoulder the responsibility for the pacification and stabilisation of Mali, and was thus eager to withdraw most of its troops as soon as possible. Therefore, Paris lobbied the UN to reinforce and take over AFISMA. Eventually, on 25 April 2013, the UN Security Council established the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which succeeded AFISMA on 1 July 2013 (*Le Monde* 25 January 2013; UN 25 April 2013).

France has remained, however, militarily present in the Sahel region. Moreover, since Operation Serval, the military withdrawal from Africa is, for the moment, definitely off the table. Instead, Paris has decided to reinforce its security role on the African continent, notably in West Africa. The French defence White Paper of 2013 was heavily influenced by France's forceful intervention in Mali. While it largely builds on the preceding version of 2008, it has significantly increased the strategic importance of Africa at the expense of Asia. Paris is still supposed to privilege a multilateral framework, and to further the Africanization of crisis management. Simultaneously, however, France has to retain the capacity to intervene, if necessarily, single-handedly – not least to help France's African allies. Therefore, the bilateral defence agreements with African countries, strong rapid reaction forces in the metropole, and pre-positioned forces in Africa are deemed essential (République française 2013).

Yet the partnership with African security actors is supposed to be strengthened. Paris is determined to cooperate with the AU and RECs on African security issues, and therefore to continue to help building up their military capacities. This was the tenor of the 2013 Elysée Summit on Peace and Security in Africa, where Hollande pledged to support the capacity-building of regional African organisations (*Le Monde* 5 December 2013; Roger 2013). The French are not, however, naïve about the Africanization of peacekeeping in Africa. The recent crises have demonstrated that after almost two decades of capacity-building, African forces are still not in a position to deal with major crises on their own. Therefore, France has strengthened the unilateral pillar – i.e. the capacity and capability to intervene directly in African conflicts – of its African strategy. This allows, if France's national interests are at stake, intervention in Africa, preferably alongside such partners as ECOWAS but, if necessary, alone (Fromion and Rouillard 2014; Commission de la défense nationale 2014; *Le Monde* 4 February 2013). Consequently, France has retained a strong military presence in Africa, where about 10,000 French soldiers are in service at five bases, and a maritime

presence in the Gulf of Guinea, as well as Operation Barkhane, the follow-up operation in Mali, and in the Central African Republic, where a limited number of troops have remained after the completion of Operation Sangaris. Two of these bases (Dakar and Abidjan), one operation (Barkhane), and the maritime presence are not only in West Africa, but are also supposed to cooperate with ECOWAS (Carayol 2015; Ministère des Armées 6 June 2017).

### ***Conclusion***

During the last and, especially, in the current decade, France's forceful interventions in West Africa have either overshadowed, or come instead of ECOWAS peace operations. This does not necessarily mean, however, that there is rivalry between France and ECOWAS member states, and that they cannot and do not work in partnership. At the theoretical level, there is a high degree of convergence between France and ECOWAS. Since the 1990s, while the West African organisation has emerged as a security and peacekeeping actor, Paris has sought to multilateralize and Africanize its security policy, and to refrain from direct military intervention. In addition, France's capacity-building efforts in West Africa, notably through RECAP, provide a practical basis for a security partnership. Within this framework, the French military has also provided material, logistical, and operational support to ECOWAS deployments. Moreover, even in response to the Ivorian and Malian crises, France has cooperated with ECOWAS, or at least groupings of its member states, at the political and/or military level. Yet as these crises also illustrate, France remains the predominant security actor in the region, and the theoretical convergence does not necessarily translate into practice. In reality, the partnership is thus not particularly effective, and does not help to enable ECOWAS to take care of its region.

The reasons for the practical divergence are manifold. Firstly, the political, strategic, and economic interests of France and ECOWAS member states are not necessarily aligned. Paris evaluates a given crisis in light of its priorities, which are to protect French economic interests and citizens in the region, as well as to safeguard France's security by maintaining regional stability, and combating terrorism and international crime. Admittedly, ECOWAS member states are also interested in regional stability. But as the Malian and Ivorian crises illustrated, they have their individual political, economic, and security concerns. This does not only make it difficult to find common ground with France, but also between ECOWAS member states themselves. This problem is further compounded by France's changing and evolving security policy. While the overall thrust of France's African strategy remains relatively constant, different Presidents have had different priorities. Secondly, and this is



directly related to the first point, the character and location of crises varies, and thus lead to different reactions and responses from the concerned actors. This was evident during the Malian crisis, when the situation was considered more urgent in Paris than in numerous West African capitals. Similarly, and this leads to the third point, the situation in Mali did not rapidly lead to a consensual response in Addis Ababa, Brussels, and New York. Yet the support of the African and international community plays an important enabling role in the Franco-ECOWAS peacekeeping partnership. Fourthly, the international and French capacity-building programmes – notably RECAMP – have to be effective, which, as it seems, they have not been. This is not only due to the character of the programmes, but also to their inefficient and ineffective implementation by ‘gatekeeper’ states. This leads to the final and probably most important point, the inequality of the military and financial capabilities and capacities between France and ECOWAS member states. Paris has, if considered necessary and willing, the military and financial means available to intervene single-handedly – at least for a limited period of time. ECOWAS member states, by contrast, remain both militarily and financially relatively impotent. In the cases that ECOWAS has been able to deploy a peace operation, it has remained dependent on operational support from France and other non-African partners. But even this often sizeable support has not necessarily allowed West African forces to be effective on the ground. The picture was even worse in the cases of the Ivorian and Malian crises, in reaction to which ECOWAS did not manage to deploy an operation at all, or only latterly in the wake of a French intervention. Despite almost two decades of capacity-building, West African armed forces lack the military capacities to address a major crisis. At a pecuniary level, both ECOWAS as an organisation and its individual members lack the financial means – as so many African organisations – to conduct peace operations. More worryingly, and as argued by David Ambrosetti and Romain Esmenjaud, African states have often lacked the political will to finance their respective regional organisation’s security role, and the participation of some in peacekeeping has been motivated by a strategy of extraversion, a desire to obtain a ‘geopolitical rent’ (2014). Simultaneously, both the financial and the military dependency are so entrenched in the Franco-African and, more generally, North-South relationship, that genuine Africanization seems to remain a distant ideal.

Nevertheless, despite its flaws and inequalities, as well as frequent divergence, the peacekeeping partnership between France and ECOWAS is increasingly close. In response to crises, they have cooperated at the diplomatic level, and shared the burden on the ground. France does the heavy lifting, the peace enforcement (Tardy 2014, 785-786), while West

African troops act as peacekeepers, either under the ECOWAS or the UN flag, and thereby provide France with legitimacy and the fig leaf of Africanization. With a certain degree of independence, ECOWAS can also deploy operations in reaction to smaller crises, such as the ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau (*Le Monde* 27 April 2012). This burden-sharing approach is not limited to West Africa, as illustrated by France's involvement in the Central African Republic with Operation Sangaris (Tardy 2013), and is likely to be reinforced in light of France's frustration with the EU and, to a lesser extent, the UN in Africa (Koepf 2012). Finally, however, the privileged partners do not have to be regional organisations, but can also be more appropriate *ad hoc* coalitions, such as the G-5 in the Sahel region (Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Chad) that cooperate with Operation Barkhane (Ministère de la Défense 2014). Ultimately, France cooperates with what it considers to be the most suitable partner in a given situation, whether this is a regional organisation, an *ad hoc* coalition, or an individual state. This seems inevitable, because security issues can have a national, transnational, regional, or transregional character. Consequently, while there is theoretical convergence between the security policies and roles of France and ECOWAS, the character of an individual crisis, the international and African contexts, the interests of Paris and West African capitals, as well as their military and financial capabilities and capacities do not necessarily align. This can either lead to a flawed partnership with ECOWAS, or alternative joint operations with selected West African and/or other African states.

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